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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NASSAU 002336

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR WBENT AND WHA/CCA JBEAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/10/2014

TAGS: [SMIG](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHSA](#) [CU](#) [BF](#)

SUBJECT: RIOT AND FIRE AT MIGRANT DETENTION CENTER

REF: NASSAU 1936

Classified By: Political Chief Michael P. Taylor for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

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11. (C) Detained Cuban migrants set fire to a dormitory at the Carmichael Road Detention Center the morning of December 9, 2004, with three detainees temporarily escaping. Violence broke out between some of the migrants and the Bahamian personnel attempting to regain control of the situation. 11 Royal Bahamas Defense Force officials and 9 detainees suffered minor injuries during the melee. At least four of the detainees were taken to Princess Margaret Hospital for treatment, two from injuries consistent with rubber bullets. Of the three escapees, one Cuban and one Dominican national were apprehended, but one Cuban remains unaccounted for. This unrest comes less than 24 hours after Minister of Labor and Immigration, Vincent Peet, made an announcement before the House of Assembly that "there is no evidence of abuse at the detention center" following an investigation by the Royal Bahamas Police Force into allegations by Amnesty International that Haitian and Cuban detainees were subject to beatings and other abuses. End Summary.

ESCAPE AND FIRE

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12. (C) At approximately 9am on December 9, two Cubans and one Dominican escaped from the Carmichael Road Detention Center in Nassau, a facility mainly used to house illegal foreign migrants waiting to be repatriated to their home countries. The Dominican and one of the Cubans were reportedly taken back into custody slightly over an hour later. Superintendent Ferguson, the Chief Immigration Officer at the detention center, confirmed that the missing Cuban national remains at large as of noon on December 10.

13. (C) In what is described by the Minister of Immigration Vincent Peet as a "separate but connected event", officers of the Royal Bahamas Defense Force and Bahamas Immigration attempted to enter the dorm occupied predominantly by Cuban males. Although the door to the dorm had been blockaded from the inside, these officers were able to gain access at approximately 11:15am. Several of the Cuban men were acting belligerently, and others surrounded the Bahamian officers to prevent them from taking custody of the hostile men. In a statement made by the Ministry of Labor and Immigration, "the dorm was set alight by the detainees who also hurled fiery objects at the officers. The dorm was effectively destroyed by the fire before it could be extinguished. In the event, the officers had to fire rubber rounds to restore order. There was no loss of life."

14. (C) To control the detainees, the RBDF and Immigration officers fired rubber bullets at the crowd. Nine Cuban detainees sustained injuries, but only four required treatment at Princess Margaret Hospital. Eleven RBDF officers sustained injuries, but none required hospitalization. The Cuban Consul General, Felix Wilson, was apprised of the situation by the Department of Immigration.

15. (C) The dormitory sustained significant damage from the fire, and will be condemned according to Superintendent Ferguson. Some of the 56 migrants occupying the dorm will be redistributed among the other dorms designated for male detainees. In a press statement released by the Department of Immigration late Thursday night (December 9), the detainees believed to have deliberately started the unrest were taken to Fox Hill Prison, "and will remain there until their removal to their place of origin."

COMMENT

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16. (C) Fox Hill Prison and the Carmichael Road Detention Center have both been consistent sources of controversy for the Bahamian government in recent years. Most recently, Cuban rights activists in South Florida raised allegations of severe beatings of Cuban detainees in October, which was followed by an Amnesty International report (see reftel).

Post believes these reports to be largely unsubstantiated. Two days before this fire, several Cubans went on a short hunger strike at the Detention Center due to the poor quality of the food, and schedule of meals. Because of limited Social Service staff as cooks, meals are served at 10am, noon and 2pm.

17. (C) Minister Peet has admitted privately to embassy officials that the situation at the detention center "was of concern to him". The detainees do not want to stay in detention and do not want to be returned to Cuba. In this instance their frustration turned to violence.

ROOD